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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a decline in educational standards and discusses the role of curriculum. After defining the problem, it presents the evidence, pointing to the following factors: (1) decreasing student achievement after the fourth or fifth grade; (2) a curriculum that reflects and perpetuates this decline, e.g., by setting course requirements too low and/or failing to offer advanced courses because few students elect to take them; and (3) "watered down" or simplified texts which are often the major source from which students learn. The paper outlines the following current proposals for minimum basic curricula: (1) the Carnegie Approach; (2) the Paideia Proposal; and (3) a core curriculum organized around a series of learning outcomes. The paper concludes by reviewing the following policy options: (1) a state-mandated core curriculum, including computer education and community service requirements; (2) local plans with state approval; (3) no promotion without academic proficiency; (4) textbook review and recommendations; (5) more time spent on basic academic subjects; (6) involvement of parents in the raising of standards; (7) rewarding excellence; (8) integrating curriculum and the world of work; (9) reducing the choice of electives; and (10) linking extra-curricular activities to academic achievement. (LHW)

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Working Paper 2

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Standards and the Role of Curriculum

A Joint Project of:
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THE ILLINOIS PROJECT FOR SCHOOL REFORM

Preface

This paper is intended as a workbook for discussion. It deals with a major issue confronting public education in Illinois and in the nation. It is written with the belief that educators and non-educators can, when the issues are presented, engage in a democratic process of discussion which can lead to enlightened decisions.

We have attempted to do essentially four things in the discussion of this issue. First, we state the problem facing public education as succinctly as we can. Second, we try to present some hard evidence that the problem does indeed merit our attention. Information from both state and national studies is used to substantiate the scope and depth of the problem at hand. Third, we give a brief overview of how the problem is being addressed elsewhere in the nation to give some sense of what others are attempting. Those approaches may or may not be appropriate for our own state. And finally, we have attempted to lay out, in the most broad strokes, some possible policy options we might consider in dealing with the issue.

Hopefully these choices will stimulate discussion and raise further questions. These policy options are not meant to be all-inclusive or complete. There may well be other and better approaches to take. The important thing is that this paper be the starting point for discussion of a complex issue.

Making public policy is no easy task. Dozens of moral, political, economic, historical and social variables interact to define what is or is not possible. Educational policy is even more complex because of the large numbers of people and interests involved. Yet as difficult as it is, our times call for serious discussion by serious people of the quality and future of America's schools.

Over a century ago, our nation made a historic and unique commitment to the concept of education for all of our people. Our goal must now be to keep open those doors of educational opportunity and to do our utmost to insure that once a child enters that door, the quality of the education received is nothing less than excellent.

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Introduction

Among the many questions citizens must ask of their schools, three seem fundamental: (1) *What* is being learned in the school?; (2) *Who* is doing the teaching?; and (3) What are the *values*, both explicit and implicit, which are being conveyed to our young?

The issue of the quality of our teachers is of central importance and is explored in our Working Paper 1 policy option pamphlet. In this booklet the other two elements, curriculum and standards, are presented for your analysis and discussion.

What ought to constitute the curriculum of the school is a complex issue that can be properly approached only when citizens ask some broader questions: What are the goals of education in general? How should the curriculum relate to the future our young people are likely to encounter? Given the rapid pace of societal change, can and should we really hope to prepare students for specific jobs? If not, what should the curriculum hope to accomplish? Is the role of the school more than preparing young people to fit into some economic "niche?" What kind of citizens do we want for this nation? And finally, should we be equally concerned with the kind of human beings — the character — of the boys and girls who attend our schools?

These are indeed broad and sweeping questions which would seem to place incredible demands and expectations on the schools. Yet it is our attempt to address each of these in our schools which has led to our current educational dilemma. If the schools attempt to meet every political, social and economic concern, can they really do anything very well? And even if these are all legitimate concerns of one generation as it looks to prepare the next generation, is it the school alone which should bear the major responsibility to do all these things?

Our attempt to have the school be all things to all people has had an impact on "standards" as well. Former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, John Gardner, addressed the issue most directly when he asked, "Can we be equal and excellent too?" The problem as Gardner saw it was whether our historic commitment to educating *everyone* is a contradiction to the entire concept of "excellence." If we really make an all-out effort to raise standards and make our schooling more rigorous, will we not leave some of the less able students behind, cause them to be discouraged and in effect, force them out of school? If that occurs what happens to our goal of equality? If, on the other hand, we allow our dedication to equality to be our first priority, does this not result in a process which keeps standards at a low or at best mediocre level to accommodate everyone? Thus the issue of raising standards ultimately becomes one of philosophy and values.

In the material that follows it should become clear that our schools have, in fact, taken a soft approach to standards. What we expect students to do in school is clearly different and less demanding than what our expectations were a generation ago. It is

equally clear that we cannot allow this to happen much longer without our nation suffering serious consequences.

Educational research shows that students can achieve high standards when they are expected to do so. It may very well be that we simply have not presented them with the challenge as directly as we should have. What is clear is that our young are not likely to reach for goals more lofty than those we set for them. Our task is to set their sights high while not abandoning the needs of all the children. Elitism is not a part of the American educational tradition. Making students stretch to reach the absolute height of their individual capacities ought to be.

How To Use This Booklet

The approaches to standards and curriculum being considered in other parts of the country are also being discussed in Illinois. They are thoughtful and promising alternatives and should form the basis for our choices here, as well.

As you consider the possible options, you should address the following questions in evaluating policies which will result in higher standards and a curriculum appropriate for the very different world in which our children are likely to live:

1. Accepting all the risks involved in predicting the future, what are the elements of a curriculum which will best prepare our young for the economic and social world of the 21st century?
2. Are there any aspects of the curriculum which ought to be eliminated or handled by some agency or institution other than the school?
3. Do the policy options insure a higher level of quality for students?
4. What are the political implications of choosing some options and not others?
5. What will the options cost, if adopted?
6. How will parents and the community react to the options considered?
7. Will the options have teacher support?
8. To what extent will raising standards discriminate against less able students? Will we, in effect, create an elitest curriculum?

As we consider *what* to do with standards and curriculum, we should also give equal attention to *how* we do it. Often the method and approach to addressing a given problem in education can be crucial in determining the potential success of the recommended solutions. Particularly important is the relationship of the state authorities to the local districts. Too much state involvement, direction and mandated activity can be restrictive and stifling to local districts. It can snuff out individuality, discourage creativity and result in a uniformity which may lend itself to comparative measurement through testing, but is a serious threat to the principle and tradition of local control of schools. Too little state leadership and direction, on the other hand, may encourage individuality and variation among local districts but result in a hodge-podge of programs which lack any coordination and defy any type of standardized measurement.

While the great majority of Illinois' 1000+ school districts will strive for a quality program with high standards, a small but significant number might not. Who is to protect the educational rights of the students in those districts? Who, but the state, can protect and guarantee high standards in those localities? These are not easy policy questions, but they are ones we must discuss if educational changes are to have any chance of success.

As you discuss these and other questions it will be helpful to write out the points made by your group. By the time you have listed some points in each question, you will have a good overview of the educational, political and fiscal dimensions your recommendations are taking.

The Illinois Project for School Reform will be bringing together local citizens' councils such as yours to regional meetings from mid-October through December. Hopefully, by that time, you will have discussed the potential options on standards and curriculum and will be ready to submit your thoughts, in writing, to your fellow citizens throughout Illinois. These combined council suggestions will form the basis for our "standards and curriculum plank" in our legislative reform package platform. So in summary:

1. Read the paper.
2. Record your comments, ideas and suggestions.
3. Attempt to reach a consensus with your group as to what specific recommendations you will forward to the regional meetings.

I. Standards and the Role of Curriculum: Defining the Problem

Recently President Reagan charged that, "Our education system, once the finest in the world, is in a sorry state of disrepair." Contemporary studies of public education reveal similar bleak assessments and point to trends that warrant cause for alarm.

For example, approximately 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the U.S. are functionally illiterate. Science achievement scores are declining and the verbal and mathematics scores on the College Board Scholastic Aptitude Test each fell approximately fifty points between 1963 and 1980.

Business and military leaders report spending millions of dollars on remedial education programs in reading, writing and basic computation. The Navy reports that one quarter of its recent recruits cannot read simple safety instructions and therefore do not have the basic skills needed to participate in the training required by our military system.

All of these factors have been taken to reflect a decline in "standards" in our educational system. While evidence of the severity of the problem is far from conclusive, it seems irrefutable that we are in some sense failing to develop the potential of large numbers of our youth.

If we are "certifying as 'educated' a generation that is poorly prepared to read, write and compute," as suggested by the Education Commission of the State's Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, we must begin to examine and reassess our educational policies, expectations and requirements.

Specifically in Illinois, we can turn our attention to two key questions: What can be done to raise standards and actual levels of student competence? And how can we improve our academic programs and content (including textbook selection) to raise standards and prepare our young people for a rapidly changing economic world?

II. Evidence of the Problem

A. The Performance Decline

One of the nation's most useful means of gauging student, group and regional achievements from the fourth through the twelfth grade is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This program provides a continuing assessment in major learning areas by testing the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes of nine, thirteen and seventeen year-olds.

Through surveys conducted between 1970 and 1981, the NAEP revealed these trends nationwide:

1. Significantly, educational performance remained relatively steady through grade four, and in the case of reading, improved substantially.
2. Academic troubles usually started in fifth or sixth grade and intensified through high school. In junior and senior high school, achievement leveled off in virtually all basic subjects and skills.

The Illinois Inventory of Educational Progress (IIEP), also administered to 4th, 8th and 11th graders, almost parallels this nationwide trend. Reading scores stayed practically level between 1979 and 1983 and there did not appear to be any improvement in reading performance on scientific or literary passages. Students seemed to do better in literal rather than inferential comprehension questions. That is, they were better at finding answers actually written in the text than they were at drawing their own conclusions.

In Illinois (as well as nationwide) the decreasing grade level achievement of children as they get older suggests that elementary basic skills are being taught, but the more complex skills that enable students to draw conclusions, form judgments and create new ideas are lacking. After 1973, the ability to compute, to add, subtract, multiply and divide did not decline. What slipped in 1978 was the ability of students of all age levels to think through problems, to understand a given set of facts and to apply mathematical solutions.

Math test results in Illinois are slightly different. In Illinois the IIEP reveals a halting, but steady increase in math scores from 1976 to 1983.

Fourth graders were better at computation than at problem solving, but 8th graders seemed to be equally skilled at both. Fourth grade scores between 1976 and 1983 went from 55 percent to 67 percent correct; eighth grade scores from 60 percent to 64 percent. All age groups did better in algebra/mathematic-type problems than in geometry/measurement ones.

When we turn to science achievement, the NAEP reports a steady decline among seventeen-year-olds. In Illinois, IIEP science results show an across-the-board decline in all skill areas. The Illinois State Board of Education's 1984 report on student achievement comments that "the pessimism expressed about the status of science education nationally may indeed apply to Illinois." While minorities in Illinois have narrowed the gap between their scores and those of the other children in reading and math, that gap has widened in science.

Between 1969 and 1974 the coherence and quality of student writing also deteriorated. In the late 70's, in response to public distress at NAEP findings, however, grammar and composition enjoyed renewed emphasis and an independent writing test was added to the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) to sample competence. In the past decade, SAT scores have declined. On a scale from *200* to *800* median verbal scores fell from a high of *478* in 1963 to a low of *424* in 1980. Mathematics scores fell in that same period from *502* to *466*. More importantly, the percentage of those with the highest scores also declined. However, while SAT scores were declining, average grades among college-bound students were rising which suggests grades have become less reliable measures of quality.

Fifty-two community colleges in Illinois have found that they must offer remedial and high school level work to bring students to where they can study in regular courses.

B. The Role of Curriculum

Why are scores for students of all backgrounds and capabilities declining? Why are academic outcomes so low?

Nationwide, few students at the secondary level are required to take courses in all the basic subjects — language, math, history and science in order to qualify for a high school diploma.

Only about 34 percent of public high school students pursue an academic course of study rather than a general or vocational program, even though more than half go to college. Roughly, 85 percent take no foreign language; 63 percent take no chemistry; 47 percent take no geometry; and 20 percent take no science whatsoever. In the 11th and 12th grades, half of the students take no math or sciences and 27 percent take no English.

Is this happening in Illinois? Historically, Illinois has not required many courses for high school graduation. State law specifies three units of English, one unit of history, .50 unit in health education, .25 unit in consumer education and 4 units in physical education (a unit represents daily study for one year) be completed for graduation. Additional graduation requirements are set by high schools for their own students, and these vary widely throughout the state. A survey of graduation requirements among all state public high schools found that a mean of one unit in mathematics, one unit in science, 1.75 units in social studies and 3.16 units in English are specified.

Although these requirements are more demanding than state law, they still are less than the mean requirements of high schools nationally. A national survey of high school graduation requirements found a mean of 3.6 English units, 1.7 math units, 1.6 science units, 2.6 social studies units and 1.7 physical education/health units.

Illinois' graduation requirements were recently changed and will become effective for ninth graders entering high school in the fall of 1984. These new requirements specify 3 years of language arts, 2 years of mathematics, 1 year of science, 2 years of social studies and 1 year of either art, music, foreign language or vocational education. On the average, this represents little change from what most high schools already require, except for an additional unit of mathematics. However, for individual high schools, and particularly small ones, even these minimal changes may prove difficult to meet.

To meet the increased requirements in mathematics and social studies these schools report that without state assistance, they would have to lengthen the school day or school year, shorten class periods or provide credit through external sources.

These minimum course requirements need to be examined more closely in light of other recommendations by the Illinois State Board of Higher Education. They are insufficient as preparation for college. The ISBHE recommended a course of study for college-bound students which specifies four years each of English (emphasizing written and oral communications and literature), social studies (emphasizing history and government), mathematics (introductory through advanced algebra, geometry, trigonometry and fundamentals of computer programming) and the sciences (including biology, chemistry and physics). In addition, at least two years of a foreign language is encouraged.

A survey of courses offered in all Illinois public high schools for 1981-1982 found that the majority of these did not offer a full program of math or science courses. Eleven percent offered no elementary algebra; 72 percent no plane and solid geometry; and 65 percent no algebra/trigonometry. Eleven percent offered no first-year chemistry; 22 percent no first-year physics; and 47 percent no advanced biology. One can only conclude that students who attend the majority of high schools in Illinois could not select a course of study recommended by the ISBHE for college preparation.

It is widely recognized both in Illinois and nationally that advanced courses are not offered in large high schools because few students elect to take them. A survey of Illinois students found that only 33 percent reported taking more than two years of mathematics, 21 percent more than two years of science and only 9 percent had taken more than two years of a foreign language.

Nationally, the percentage of students who elect a general curriculum which required fewer academic courses increased from 12 percent to 36 percent in 1980.

An analysis of high school transcripts from 1961 to 1981 showed an 8 percent decrease in time spent on academic courses, while the time spent on non-foundational subjects increased 5 percent. A survey of Illinois seniors found that 40 percent were enrolled in a general education program, 34 percent in an academic program and 26 percent in a vocational program.

Another problem is that students are fulfilling their subject requirements with remedial-level classes. One third of Illinois seniors report having taken remedial English while 30 percent report having taken remedial mathematics. Of those who took remedial English, 70 percent also took remedial mathematics and of those who took remedial classes, only 18 percent went on to take advanced English courses. Only 10 percent of the remedial mathematics students pursued advanced work in mathematics.

These statistics are disturbing. Roughly one third to one half of Illinois students are studying less demanding general programs and are taking the minimally required basic courses. Moreover, many of these subjects are fulfilled at the remedial level. Students who seek to prepare for college may find that their school does not offer advanced courses (particularly in mathematics, science and foreign language). Typically, this may either be because the school is too small to offer them, or because too few students select them.

C. "Watered Down" Texts

While curricular revisions are responsible for steadily diluting course content, "watered down" textbooks have also contributed to problems, particularly when the textbook is the major source from which the students learn. These textbooks have simplified sentence structures, are deficient in specific vocabulary and paragraph development, contain an overabundance of illustrative material, omit new vocabulary and rely heavily on teachers' directions and guidelines. Students who are limited to texts of this quality experience difficulties in the areas of critical thinking, comprehension and analysis on standardized tests.

A recent College Board study found that a 30-year decline in test scores was associated with a parallel decline in the difficulty of textbooks. The question is: Did pupils' declining ability create the need for easier books, or did the use of easier books contribute to the decline in pupils' reading ability? Studies indicate that in the primary grades where reading test results have remained steady or improved, more challenging material in readers had been used.

Workspace:

For your notes, opinions, and suggestions.

III. Some Current Proposals

At a time when so many problems with our schools are coming to light, it is fortunate that a number of recommendations for action have recently been issued. A common theme among them is that the best way to improve our schools is to establish a minimum basic curriculum for all students. Another common thread is that the exact curriculum is best determined locally. A third element of these proposals is the assumption that the local high school is to provide a basic curriculum for every student *before* allocating resources for elective courses. Basic academic skill courses are to be given priority status and the first question a discussion on curriculum ought to ask is: "If we can not do all we would like to do in the schools, what is it that the curriculum absolutely has to do?"

A. The Carnegie Approach

One approach to explore is the Carnegie Foundation's *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America.* Their proposed Core of Common Learning totals 14 1/2 academic units.

5 units, Language	Basic English, writing	(1)
	Basic English, speech	(1/2)
	Literature	(1)
	Foreign Language	(2)
	Arts	(1/2)
2 1/2 units, History	U.S. History	(1)
	Western Civilization	(1)
	Non-Western Studies	(1/2)
1 unit, Civics		
2 units, Science	Physical Science	(1)
	Biological Science	(1)
2 units, Mathematics		
1/2 unit, Technology		
1/2 unit, Health		
1/2 unit, Seminar on Work		
1/2 unit, Senior Independent Project		

These units are combined with electives in the last three years and a student service community requirement to be completed after school hours.

B. The Paideia Proposal

Another design for a core curriculum is *The Paideia Proposal.* This focuses on three levels of learning: *organized knowledge* in subject areas (language, literature, fine arts, mathematics, natural science, history, geography and social studies), *intellectual skills* (reading, writing, speaking, listening, calculating, problem-solving,

observing, measuring, estimating and exercising critical judgment) and an *enlarged understanding of ideas and values* (discussion of books, works of art and involvement in artistic activities).

C. Learning "Outcomes"

Yet another design would establish a core curriculum organized around a series of learning outcomes. (Learning experiences and materials would be matched to objectives in each subject area.)

Many people outside of the educational profession are unfamiliar with "outcomes" or "competencies," as they are sometimes called. Non-educators tend to think of courses, units and subjects when they think of high school studies. However, many educators think that the skills that students acquire as they take courses are more important than the information to which they are exposed. Instead of thinking of the material studied in a subject, they prefer to think of activities students should be able to accomplish once they have studied a subject.

For example, the Education Commission of the States has published a pamphlet entitled, "Action for Excellence." Here, competencies are listed in reading, writing, speaking and listening, mathematics, science reasoning, basic employment, economics and computer literacy. These competencies, developed by business representatives on the Task on Education for Economic Growth, list things that students should be able to do when they complete high school. Some sample competencies are listed below:

Reading	The ability to vary one's reading speed and method and one's purpose for reading according to the type of material.
Writing	The ability to write standard English sentences with correct sentence structure, verb forms, punctuation, capitalization, possessives, plural forms and other matters of mechanics — choice and spelling.
Mathematics	The ability to perform the computation of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division using natural numbers, fractions, decimals and integers.
Reasoning	The ability to draw reasonable conclusions from information found in various sources, whether written, spoken, tabular or graphic, and to defend one's conclusions rationally.
Economics	The ability to understand personal economics and its relationship to the skills required for employment and promotability.

Computer Literacy	The ability to follow pre-defined procedures and to understand when the procedure is completed successfully and when it is not.

In designing a core curriculum, it is not necessary to choose one design (such as subject units) over another (such as competencies). *These can be combined in a plan, as when competencies are established for a group of required courses.*

In Illinois, a "Committee to Define State Requirements For What Students Should Know and Be Able To Do," held hearings in April and May of 1984 and proposed general outcomes for high school students in the fine arts, language arts, mathematics, physical development and health, science and social studies for statewide adoption.

Workspace:

For your notes, opinions, ideas and suggestions.

IV. Some Policy Options To Consider

Option A - A State-Mandated Core Curriculum, including Computer Education and Community Service Requirements

The Illinois Constitution clearly states that education is a state responsibility. Such responsibility requires the legislature and the Illinois State Board of Education to play a leadership role in the area of standards and curriculum. And it is equally important that the state monitor local districts to guarantee that students receive basic instruction which will allow them to be productive members of society. This state initiative should include four component parts.

1. A core curriculum to be required in every school district.

Below is a comparative table of curricula recommended by others. It can form the basis for the development of a core curriculum that many believe is essential for a quality education for all high school students.

	Illinois Requirements, Pre-1984 (Units)	Illinois Requirements, 1984 (Units)	State Bd. of Higher Ed. (Units)
English/ Language Arts	3	3	4
Foreign Language		1 alt.	2 alt.
Mathematics		2	3
Computer/ Technology			
Science		1	3
Social Science	1	2	3
Health	.5	.5	
Employment/ Comm. Svc.			
Consumer Ed.	.25		
Physical Ed.	4	4	
Art & Music		1 alt.	4 alt.
Vocational Education		1 alt.	
Sr. Independent Study			

It is important to note that computer education and community service are two new additions to the subjects generally considered essential to a core curriculum.

While Ernest Boyer, author of the Carnegie Foundation report, may be right when he says, "No school should buy computers, or any other expensive piece of hardware, until key questions have been asked and answered," it is certain that computers are here to stay and their understanding and use will become increasingly necessary. Under recent California legislation, $5 million was appropriated to improve teacher computer education courses as part of the implementation of its student computer education requirement. In North Carolina, the General Assembly is being urged to establish a micro-computer fund to encourage computer education in schools.

High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America recommends a new Carnegie unit in community service. It calls for all high school students to "complete a service requirement . . . that would involve them in volunteer work in the community or at school." The rationale for the proposal is that "beyond the formal academic program the high school should help all students meet their social and civic obligations. During high school young people

Carnegie Foundation (Units)	Nation at Risk (Units)	California (Units)
3	4	3
2	2	1 alt.
2	3	2
.5	.5	
2	3	2
3.5	3	3
.5		
1.5		
		1 alt.
.5 alt.		

should be given opportunities to reach beyond themselves and feel more responsibly engaged. They should be encouraged to participate in the communities of which they are a part."

Illinois should include both computer education and community service in the development of its core curriculum.

2. Defined competencies in each subject area which will form the basis for student evaluation.

The learning outcomes or competencies formulated by the State Board of Education should be broadly circulated, public comment should be solicited and a set of outcomes should be adopted by the end of the 1984-1985 school year.

3. Evaluations of competencies in the core curriculum as determined by state-written and state-administered tests.

Once the competencies are adopted, the State Board of Education should consider the course of action being recommended in North Carolina. There, the State Board of Education is being urged to "develop appropriate testing procedures and measurements to be used in implementing a competency-based curriculum."

4. The establishment of financial incentive programs to reward districts for their student performance of excellence in mastering the competencies of the core curriculum.

In California, the legislature appropriated $7 million to launch a pilot program to award financial bonuses to high schools that voluntarily participate in a new Education Improvement Incentive Program and that demonstrate improved student performances on basic skills achievement tests.

Option B - Local Plans with State Approval

While education may well be a state responsibility, it was never the intention of the framers of our constitution to involve the state in the detailed day-to-day operations of our schools.

Local control of schools is an old and valued tradition which should be jealously guarded. Mandates are not needed. Rather, the state should promote initiatives which will encourage maximum local creativity and individualism. A different, but perhaps more appropriate role for the state would be to:

- Issue no specific curriculum or standards mandates but establish only curricular guidelines that would be the minimum local districts would have to meet.
- Require local districts to submit plans describing what curricular approaches they would follow and what set of standards they would establish for their students. The role of the state would be to review and approve plans to determine if local standards meet minimum guidelines established by the state.
- Require local districts to create and administer locally written tests to determine if a student has acquired adequate basic skills to warrant graduation from the 8th and 12th grades.

Option C - No Promotion Without Academic Proficiency

The Illinois Commission on the Improvement of Elementary and Secondary Education has made the following recommendation, among others:

"Require all regular education pupils to demonstrate academic proficiency levels at the 4th, 7th, 9th and 11th grades, in accordance with established statewide criteria, with effective dates as follows: reading, 1987-88, reading and math, 1988-89, and reading, math and language arts, 1989-90. Said criteria shall include teacher evaluations. Students must perform at an academic level no more than one year below their grade level in order to be advanced to the next grade. Pupils achieving at lesser rate/grade level shall be retained not more than one year, consecutively. Teacher judgment based on classroom performance may override retention for those students who are no more than six months below the acceptable level of proficiency. Services of a remedial nature (e.g., smaller classes, specialized teachers, and appropriate texts) shall be provided for students performing below proficiency levels."

Option D - Textbook Review and Recommendations

The legislature should require the Superintendent of the Education Service Region to establish a "Textbook Review and Recommendation Board." This board would be composed of educators and non-educators from the region, with representatives from local colleges and universities included, as well. This panel would review texts for academic soundness and rigor appropriate for the class and make these evaluations available to local district boards of education for their use. The local board would retain decision making as to text selection but teachers, parents and text publishers would know that such an evaluation system was operational and available for their consultation.

Option E - Spend More Time on Basic Academic Subjects

While most citizens would agree that a well-rounded curriculum that offers choices is important, the courses need not carry equal weight of importance. Recent "Time on Task" educational research has enlightened us on how much time — minutes of the day — is actually spent on academic instruction. Generally speaking, one can conclude that the more time spent the better the results. Thus the choice between "basic" courses and supplementary or enrichment courses ought not to be viewed as "either/or" decisions, but rather how can the minutes of the school day be allocated so that basic skill acquisition is guaranteed. Perhaps such a time on task component ought to be part of a local plan, as described in Option B.

Option F - Involve Parents in the Raising of Standards

In a recent study of the academic achievements of American and Japanese students, our students did not fare well. A major finding of the study was that a large part of the reason for this discrepancy was American parents made a sharper division between the educating role of the school and the home.

Americans, to a much greater degree than the Japanese, view education as almost exclusively the responsibility of the school. In contrast, Japanese parents believe that they have an important and clear responsibility to *share* the education of their children with the schools. Among many potential actions to be considered in this area are:

1. Local boards should be required by the ISBA (Illinois School Board Association) to develop policy statements which will clarify to parents what is expected of their children after school and serve as one accountability check of parents on the school.
2. The ISBA should strongly encourage local boards to require that parents come to the school to pick up report cards from the students' teachers. Such a requirement will enhance parental awareness of their children's academic progress.
3. Local superintendents and local boards should develop "Learning Contracts" to be agreed on between students, parents and teachers. Such a model has been developed by the National Committee for Citizens on Education. The contract is a written agreement between all three parties which recognizes that all have responsibility in attaining the academic and behavioral goals for the individual student. Such a document clarifies and makes precise all the participating parties' roles, responsibilities and expectations and is a clear instrument for mutual accountability.

Option G - Reward Academic Excellence

Students will respond to academic challenges if such challenges are presented to them and if it is clear that the adult community expects high performance. A key ingredient here is that academic achievement be recognized and rewarded. In North Carolina, students who exceed the core requirements are honored as "North Carolina Scholars." California has appropriated $100,000 to enable seniors to compete, based on high-achievement tests, for graduation honors.

The ISBA, in conjunction with local school districts should organize an "academic olympics" for Illinois. Here students would progress from the local to the state level and be rewarded through

various means until they could be state "gold medal" winners in various categories of achievement. Final prizes might be four-year scholarships to one of our universities.

It is sad, but significant, that in Illinois today no scholarships are awarded solely on the basis of academic achievement. This should be corrected by the General Assembly and the Illinois State Scholarship Commission.

Option H - Curriculum and the World of Work

In *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*, Ernest Boyer states, "When it comes to preparing students for a specific job and putting them on the first rung of the career ladder, the results of vocational education are largely disappointing." Corroborating this observation are the results of a 1983 survey of the Chicago metropolitan business community which indicate that the practice of training for specific occupations should be re-examined, and vocational education programs that are not supported by well-trained staff, up-to-date equipment and projected labor needs should be discontinued. Business can do this kind of training more efficiently and effectively.

This survey, conducted by Chicago United, a business leadership group, echoes the findings of national studies done by the College Board and the New York Center for Public Resources. All of these reports indicate that employers want entry-level employees who have a positive work attitude, coupled with academic competencies and the ability to learn. Because of rapid changes in the economy and the workplace, problem-solving skills and adaptability are quickly outpacing specific occupational skills as key determinants of employability.

Career education and the preparation for employment are not the sole responsibility of vocational education. World of work concepts and the link between classroom subjects and their use by workers in a variety of occupations should be woven throughout the curriculum of all students, K-12.

Career education should go far beyond the annual school career day. Components of career education, including speakers, graphic materials, job site visits and academic classes in a work setting should be an on-going part of the curriculum. Since school success requires many of the same qualities (attendance, punctuality, meeting homework and project deadlines) as work success, teachers have an excellent opportunity to teach appropriate work attitudes as they instill academic competency.

Option I - Reduce the Choice of Electives

Defining a core curriculum is one problem. What to do with the proliferation of electives is another. In the late 1970s, 741 Illinois high schools were offering 2,100 separate courses. Academic courses experiencing the greatest growth in the last 15 years are these: physical education, music performance, remedial English, driver education, cooperative education, health and physical education, distributive education, general shop, training for marriage/adulthood and vocational home economics.

Among possible options are the following:

1. The freshmen and sophomore years should be devoted almost exclusively to fulfilling requirements of the core curriculum.
2. The junior and senior years should emphasize core subjects, but with about half-time permitted for elective clusters.
3. Access to electives should be *conditional* upon a student successfully demonstrating the "competencies" called for in core curriculum subjects.
4. Elective courses should be designed to strengthen or remediate measurable deficiencies in core subjects. Language arts, for example, should not be the exclusive province of the English Department.

Option J - Link Extra-Curricular Activities to Academic Achievement

It has been estimated that 41 percent of Illinois students participate in athletic activities, 19 percent in music, 17 percent in class-related activities and 5 percent in drama. Students who do not perform well on competency exams and/or cannot maintain a satisfactory grade point average (perhaps a "C") and/or are clearly deficient in basic skills, should not be permitted to participate or have their participation limited in other school-sponsored and supervised non-academic activities.

Workspace:

For your notes, opinions, ideas and suggestions.